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This paper dismantles the main arguments for Swedish NATO membership from the most illustrious advocates. None of the conclusions in favour of NATO presented by the Government in the May 13 report survive scrutiny. In conclusion, even if the assumptions are taken at face-value, it does not follow that NATO will enhance Swedish security. Pro-NATO arguments rely on a naïve understanding of international relations, contracts and incentives. Analysis of the incentive structure of so-called binding agreements reveals that the NATO mechanism does not guarantee as much as commonly advertised. NATO is a deficient insurance for Sweden as it increases the risk of worst-case scenarios while current threats, as assessed by the May 13 report, remain minor as non-aligned. Finally, the historical arguments from NATO advocates, only strengthen the case for non-alignment.

Keywords: *NATO*; *Contract theory*; *Governance*; *Review*

NATO MEMBERSHIP DEVOID OF RATIONAL BASIS

Six talking points about Swedish national security framed the Government's May 13 press conference days before the upcoming Social-democratic party meeting, and NATO debate in parliament. There has been little debate so far, and as it stands, Sweden will most likely become a NATO member without any debate matching the historical significance of the matter.

The points at the press conference were handpicked from a recent 'security analysis', initiated by the Government of Sweden, in view of the war between Russia and Ukraine. Four of them mentioned NATO, including one which appears as the final conclusion of a three-step argument favouring NATO membership.

These talking points are representative for the content of the report, *Deterioration of the Security Environment – Implications for* Sweden, which starts its security assessment with reference to WWII. These are a shortcut to Swedish NATO debate at the highest political level as they are a modern-day variation of the main arguments of NATO proponents throughout Swedish political history.

The report also is the most rigorous fresh assessment from authorities on Sweden's security options in this critical juncture. Most of the conclusions have explicitly been publicly supported and invoked by the political elite to support NATO membership. Seasoned NATO advocates looked pleased, and one was even congratulated at the conference with reference to the conclusions. No new arguments which radically departed from the report appeared at the conference, with representatives from all political parties.

This paper shows that the main arguments for NATO in the report and from leading advocates are invalid. Therefore, NATO membership is devoid of rational basis, in view of publicly stated arguments to date.

THREE-STEP ARGUMENT FOR NATO MEMBERSHIP

These six points were presented as conclusions of the report:

- The Russia crisis is structural, systematic and long-term.
- Sweden's current defence- and security collaborations are valuable but do not comprise mutually binding defence obligations.
- The foremost consequence of Swedish NATO membership is taking part of NATO's collective security.
- *Swedish NATO membership would raise the threshold for military conflicts and thus have a deterrent effect in northern Europe*
- From a security perspective, the Baltic Sea region and the Cap of the North constitute a single area. Sweden would contribute to increase like-minded neighbours' security with NATO membership.
- NATO-membership would not affect Sweden's possibilities to continue to promote core Swedish values in foreign- and security policy. Sweden could continue its commitment for nuclear disarmament.

Source: Government Offices [LINK].

All of these points are more or less quotes of the main results of the report [LINK], and as already mentioned, they form the following argument in view of the content of the report and most of the presentation:

The first step establishes the current state of affairs with the two opening points. They say that Sweden's valuable international agreements are deficient when it comes to ensure defence and security at a time when the whole world is in its worst security crisis since WWII. The reason for this is that the agreements are not deemed credible or appear uncertain in terms of commitment and quality of assistance (Ds 2022:8, p.5, p32).

The next step is an impact assessment of NATO, which is presented as the only viable alternative in the report.

The second step begins by establishing that the main consequence of NATO membership is full access to its security, and then proceed with an evaluation. The assessment is that security and defence would improve with NATO membership, and is a quote from the report:

Swedish NATO membership would raise the threshold for military conflicts and thus have a deterrent effect in northern Europe (Ibid. p.31f)

The report also establishes that EU collaboration or agreements, bilateral mainly, are not enough nor feasible to face the current menace. (29f, 39f)

In summary, the first two steps establish that Sweden currently is facing a security crisis, and its current defence and security agreements are deficient because they lack binding obligations or are uncertain. Joining NATO, which is the only feasible alternative, reduces uncertainty and provides a platform for credible binding agreements of mutual aid. Therefore, joining NATO will remedy the current deficiency in Sweden's security and defence situation in the worst security crisis since WWII.

The last step refers to Swedish self-determination and brand with regard to core values in international relations. The once most obvious alternative, to strengthen Scandinavian cooperation, is tackled by insisting that such collaboration will be strengthened with Swedish NATO membership. The last point addresses Swedish brand as a peacemaker and a benevolent force.

In Summary, the first two steps conclude that NATO would address Swedish security and defence deficiency at a time when Sweden is in need of such remedy. The last third step anticipates critique by establishing that Swedish self-determination and political identity will remain unscathed in the event of a membership.

The implicit conclusion thus is: Sweden should join NATO because its defence and security would improve, without losing self-determination or political identity.

CRITIQUE OF PART ONE – STEP ONE AND TWO

The first step argues that Swedish security is deficient due to uncertainty and lack of binding agreements in view of Russian aggression. The most obvious problem with this statement is that there are no arguments presented in the report, or by the politicians present at the conference, which successfully establish why Sweden 2022 is more threatened by today's Russia than it was by the Soviet Union under the Cold War – or e.g. would have been under WWII with even more assistance to Finland.

THE HISTORICAL REJECTION

However, historical perils should not be exaggerated either. The Finns, who have been even more eager to join, were allowed to keep their country even under Joseph Stalin after all. Why would Putin be worse? The historical battleground for the sake of the argument has not even been chosen by me. It is in the tradition of illustrious NATO proponents to invoke the incredible or rather transparent pseudo-neutrality of Sweden since WWII when the cooperation with USA and Western allies intensified. Indeed, the seasoned advocate who was congratulated at the conference, Allan Widman, reiterated this argument by stating that Sweden's cover was never credible as the Russians noticed that Sweden cheated with the US. The Right made rhetorical criticism on this point. They argued Swedish foreign policy always was a peril due to the unconvincing cover, and it is about time to also question the wisdom of Swedish non-alignment historically.

However, their critique buttresses a greater conundrum which in fact dissolves the first step of their argument. Insistence on historical perils due to the non-aligned stance, and commensurability with present dilemmas, provides a wealth of evidence showing that Sweden faced worse without formally joining a military alliance – even when perceived as collaborative with the enemy from a Russian perspective – when Soviet-Russia was a super power with satellites at the heart of Europe.

How about current assessments? According to the report:

Russia will be weakened militarily by its war of aggression against Ukraine for some time to come. Consequently, Russia's capacity to carry out a conventional military attack against other countries is limited. (Ibid. P36)

This point reinforces the aforementioned objection – Russia poses no threat by most conventional means, and has the capacity to 'carry out limited acts of violence against Sweden' (Ibid.), which effectively rules out invasion.

No one has ever put forward a convincing argument why Sweden needs stronger reassurances than under the Cold War to cope with such meagre Russian threat. The irony is that no one ever will if they adhere to the arguments and assessments from the most illustrious NATO advocates.

REJECTION OF THE OVERARCHING ARGUMENT

The other part of the argument focuses on a narrow contract-theory hypothesis about superior governance. Economies of scale, specialisation, information, planning, management, infrastructure, access to supplies etc. are thought to increase Swedish military capacity. Moreover, uncertainty about aid and military assistance will decrease as the commitment is assumed to be greater within NATO than commensurable bilateral agreements. [1]

The greater conundrum is of course this may be true *given* a conflict involving Sweden takes place. As any simple brawler can confess, the capacity to violence is not a good guarantee for not getting involved in it. Sweden will make itself a target if it joins NATO and there is a looming risk Russia will begin to treat Sweden as an enemy if Sweden joins. This may in turn trigger hostile operations without invoking an all-out war, in principle for as long as Sweden remains a member.

[1] This essentially states the tenets for the collective-security argument at the press conference. For reference in the report see pp.31-35

In the event NATO and Russia clash in an all-out European war, a non-aligned Sweden will be much safer as the likelihood of becoming a target of nuclear weapons decreases if there is no NATO infrastructure, materiel or coordinated offensive military capacity worth targeting. To counter this statement, one must show that the Russians will use their limited nuclear warheads without a rational plan of action, along the lines that virtually anyone will be targeted with more or less equal probability, no matter military benefits.

Unfortunately this scenario is relevant due to arguments put forward by NATO proponents, but without evidence of capacity of deeper thought. If one assumes limited 'capacity to carry out a conventional military attack against other countries' as the report does, then it stands to reason that alternatives will be used instead.

Indeed, the report gives peacetime-examples as psychological warfare and sabotage. But symptomatically, it also suggests the use of long-range weapons and signalling with nuclear weapons. (Ibid.p36). The latter will of course not just be a signal in the event Sweden is a NATO-enemy with positive net-benefit of nuclear destruction due to its specialised role in a hostile military organisation. Thus, the likelihood of a terminal attack against Sweden cannot be disentangled from an increased military capacity within NATO in the event of a world war.

This has the following fundamental implication: Even if the premises of NATO proponents are accepted as true, their arguments nevertheless are wrong. What seems intuitive – greater military capacity will be beneficial – is in fact detrimental to security in the event Sweden needs it, if Sweden joins NATO. The idea usually is to insure oneself from events one cannot afford to face without insurance. Joining NATO would on the other hand risk to worsen the outcomes of a wide range of scenarios entailing the greatest hazards.

REJECTION OF THEORY

As already mentioned, the tenets of the argument is theory of organisation or contract theory. The previous section explored the case when the hypothesised effects of superior organisation, binding agreements, and access to more resources within NATO were taken at face value. This section sets the stage for scrutiny of theory.

In summary, the benefits of joining NATO in terms of binding agreements are much weaker than insinuated in the report and by NATO proponents. Thus other measures to safeguard security – other than the formal – must be contemplated. Additional topics on the astonishing naivety in this regard will be reviewed in the next section.

Although guaranties are codified in the treaty, in the end, countries decide for themselves how to assist others. This means that the NATO commitment certainly is more than a verbal gentleman's agreement, mainly due to the ink and paper. In terms of incentives, not necessarily much more than an ordinary bilateral agreement or indeed merely virtue and good will.

Reputation works in civil matters in a context with some degree of rule of law, affluence and predictability. In other words it is not to be taken at face value in international relations in times of turbulence and conflict. What a country is prepared to do when it is safe is not the same thing as what it will do when say, one of the most peripheral members in terms of geography and junior membership is tactically nuked to make an example, attached with a credible message to the rest of sincere intentions of peace talks. The amount of scenarios which would test the solidarity within NATO are countless.

The assertion that a NATO country never has been attacked by the Russians is not a serious remark in favour of membership in view of merely a subset of what I have said so far. But it is clear evidence that NATO, which is in a trajectory of conflict at the moment, has not been tested so far.

In conclusion, NATO formally binds countries to mutual assistance. *But the guarantee is not binding in terms of incentives in a vast array of scenarios*. Even if one is to remain optimistic and naive, the formal agreement clearly states that countries are free to choose the nature and level of assistance.

DARK NATO – ROAD TO SERFDOM 2.0

NATO proponents have so far displayed a remarkably naïve understanding. Further analysis reveals that self-determination and core values are endangered by the incentives of this military organisation.

Obviously the leaders of NATO understand the difference between ink on paper and true commitment. To ensure commitment proper incentives must be given. Trust generated by iterated games played on peace-time scenarios break down when all-out war breaks out. Great wars are in important regards closer to one-shot affairs in terms of the rearranging potential of status quo in unpredictable ways.

Incentives can be given by virtually forcing countries to undertake tasks which would implicate them deeply enough in the NATO project, in such a manner that the country would have no way out when conflict erupts but to follow command. One very compelling reason is of course, that the country would be made a plausible target, and that its defence would be rearranged in a manner so that it would be difficult for the country to defend itself without the help of others. In such a state of the world countries become as dependent as any specialised entity in a supply line. But much like the ordinary economy, the leaders of powerful monopolies would circumvent such limitations.

Some countries will have more or less natural dispositions to collaborate due to e.g. geographical considerations and ideological inclination of its leadership, and thus have more credible incentives to commit. Others would have to leave some kind of collateral.

More sophisticated but sinister path to ensure incentive compatibility for a joint war effort is to control the political system of the countries in the organisation. I have previously proposed a theory which opens up for the possibility of enslaving people without interfering with the perceptions of freedom and democracy, while remaining unseen (See e.g. Echeverría 2020). Unfortunately the wealth of disturbing evidence from work-place harassment and whistle-blower literature are far from the most appalling examples.

Daniele Ganser has provided a systematic study of the secret terror networks employed by NATO in Europe in order to exert social control with terror, including political assassinations. These dark networks effectively became parts of a shadow government in all corners of society and were able to exploit democratic institutions for their purposes (See e.g. Ganser 2005, 2016).

The road to serfdom through NATO is beset on all sides by incentives which, from a theoretical point of view, may lead to vile outcomes without sinister intentions to begin with. Not even the need for secrecy has to be invoked.

The basic reason is that as countries become specialised, and specialisation is one way to ensure commitment as outlined above, such tendency becomes the way the organisation works and is planned. Thus even countries which do not have much NATO infrastructure may play a specific part according to a script. Due to the need of planning ahead, it would be devastating if one country drops out in the event of war. Therefore, there are strong incentives to ensure the chain of command through coercion when other means are insufficient for some countries due to heterogeneity. This is especially the case in periods when conflict is looming large.

The volatility and unpredictability of a true democracy is thus detrimental to the desired predictability of an overarching plan. The perceptions of a democracy, staged and directed in accordance to script, becomes more desirable.

IN CONCLUSION – TEMINAL REMARKS

The conclusions of NATO proponents do not follow from the assumptions. Historical parallels suggest that Sweden has faced far worse as a non-aligned country, and has been able to come on top with superior diplomatic flexibility rather than superior brute force.

The theoretical arguments for NATO membership are based on assumptions to be trusted rather than serious thought. The main claim is that NATO provides the binding agreements Sweden dearly needs.

Analysis reveals that the incentive structure of the binding agreements, as presented by NATO proponents e.g. with reference to article 5, is just a formality with far less superior guarantees than advertised. In essence, it is up to each country to decide the nature and level of assistance to an ally. What looks promising in peacetime is not what is to be expected in an all-out war. Uncertainty remains.

Security is not proven to be ensured nor enhanced, even if one accepts the assumptions of NATO advocates. Increased military capacity as a non-aligned does not equal a corresponding increase as a NATO member. In the former case it may increase security, but in the latter it entails a risk to become an even bigger target against a nuclear-power foe.

NATO is a terrible insurance policy for Sweden as it worsens the risk for a worst-case scenario outcome. Like most insurances, there are problems with **a)** adverse selection – those who join may have the biggest risks **b)** moral hazard – those who join may take greater risks on behalf of others, effectively increasing the price. There is no serious discussion about this by NATO-advocates or in the May 13 report.

Ultimately, Sweden is safe without such 'insurance' in view of existing threat assessments. The constituency is not protected by increased risk induced by military undertakings beyond democratic control.

This discussion also has major implications on the claim that Swedish membership would increase security in the region. Once again, military capacity may increase but not security. The whole region will be seen as an enemy, and a future nuclear-armed adversary will plan accordingly, in response to the plans for the region. A non-aligned Sweden could have a calming effect on current tensions.

Note that the hazards of NATO-membership are structural, long-term, and thus beyond the narrow focus on a transition period towards membership. As a corollary, the description of NATO merely as a defence alliance which 'does not seek confrontation with Russia' (Ibid.p35), is exceptionally controversial. Even respected US scholars have for a long time proposed that NATO overexpansion would lead to conflict. Indeed, this is not only the explicit Russian view. President Biden recently declared that the US seeks to weaken the Russians.

The war in Ukraine is thus perceived as a proxy war. It would be ludicrous to propose Russian or Western military experts mostly hold a naïve formalistic view of NATO, its leaders – or aggressive military campaigns by its members – not formally in the name of the 'defence alliance'.

The conclusion that:

Swedish NATO membership would raise the threshold for military conflicts and thus have a deterrent effect in northern Europe

Remains an opinion. In view of the questionable NATO mechanism for mutually binding agreements; common knowledge military adventurism by NATO countries; the proxy war in Ukraine; and increased risk of worst-case scenarios as a member, such dogma appears as a fiction.

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